Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 13 Number 8 August 2016

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 21st August 2016: Narsapur Reserve Forest. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Always a dependable birding location, the beauty and bird richness of the verdant Narsapur Forest would be much-enhanced by the recent rains. This would be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: THE LIFE OF BIRDS: Episode-1: To Fly Or Not To Fly
Wednesday, 17th August 2016, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Birds have fascinated us right from the dawn of history. Birds have been depicted as symbols of power in many an ancient civilization. In this first episode of the famous documentary series, THE LIFE OF BIRDS, Richard Attenborough takes you through a thoroughly enjoyable exploration into the secret lives of birds.

A Paradise called Kangra Valley

Text and photos: Chandra Sekhar Bandi

Kalij Pheasant

Rolling on my bed, I waited for my alarm to ring. I was aware of the daybreak and was tempted to peep out of the window, but I chose to wait for my alarm, for it is precise and sweet! The Bulbuls started their social singing and the sparrows too joined the party, but I waited for my alarm, for it is pleasant and melodious. A few minutes later, I rejoiced as I heard a sweet "tee… tee… tee… teet… teen" alarm repeated multiple times. An alarm that glues me to the bed, wanting to hear more; an alarm that had me in paradise; one that left an unforgettable impression… the alarm is the sweet song of Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*).

I have been birding since a few years, and I had seen, and heard the harsh call of, a Paradise-flycatcher many times. However, I had never heard its beautiful song until one of them decided to hang around our bedroom window for two months. I was fortunate to spend three carefree months with my family in a small village called Rakkar, near Dharamshala, at the foothills of Dhauladhar range of Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh. Waking up looking at snow peaks out of your bedroom window while listening to the song of the Paradise-flycatcher is one of the memorable experiences of our lives.

From May to July, 2016, I spent time doing casual birding at multiple locations in the valley at a variety of altitudes, spellbound by the experiences and sights. Here are some of those experiences...

Kangra Valley in Himachal Pradesh lies right below the western Himalayan (Dhauladhar) ranges, nourished by multiple glacial rivers and perennial streams, thus creating a variety of habitats. The sharp and seemingly abrupt rise of mountains results in a huge altitude variance within a short distance. More than 550 species of birds have been recorded here, thus providing one an opportunity to see higher-altitude birds as well as those of the plains. The altitude ranges from 600m to 3000m or so. While the higher elevations host Deodar, Pine and Rhododendron forests, the lower altitudes have terraced farms, multiple stretches of lowland and riverine forests. The Pong Dam, that apparently hosts 20% of the world's population of Bar-headed Geese, besides other wetlands species, lies in this valley.

Great Barbet

The arrival of summer in this part of the world is announced by the two Barbets that go on a singing spree. The Great Barbet (*Psilopogon virens*), with its loud call, is a clear winner, but its lesser cousin, the Blue-throated Barbet (*Psilopogon asiaticus*) is no less vocal.

Blue-throated Barbet

The Yellow-billed Magpie and Blue Whistling Thrushes are the boldest and most frequently seen birds close to human habitation. Himalayan Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*), Russet Sparrow (*Passer rutilans*) and House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) are widely seen at lower altitudes. The Slaty-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula himalayana*), identified easily by the golden-yellow tail-tips, go on their morning and evening sojourns in groups, and it's a sight to watch them fly together flashing the yellow tail-tips. Besides, a group of Plum-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) and Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) were "regulars" on my morning walks.

One fortunate day, I stretched my morning hike a little further as I saw big birds circling and swooping down. Oh boy, I was never so glad to see/smell a dead animal! At the turn of the road, I saw nothing less than 30 Himalayan (*Gyps himalayensis*) and Eurasian Griffons (*Gyps fulvus*) finishing off what appeared like some dead cattle left by villagers. I maintained my distance though the vultures never appeared deterred by my presence. For the next 30 minutes or so, I could watch closely - their mighty wings, their funny walk, short flight, swooping down actions. It made for a wonderful memory. Not sure about the vultures, but I returned home content! Later, I learned that they were nesting up the hill near a small village at around 1700m, and I regularly spotted them from the luxury of our balcony. Watching them use the thermals and fly high with the snow-clad peaks in the background is a birdwatcher's delight.

Himalayan & Eurasian Griffons

Being a regular on the same path has its advantages. Within a few days, I could predict the regular perches of some of the birds. I knew the Asian Barred Owlet's (*Glaucidium cuculoides*) regular haunt, the Great Barbet's nest, the Plumbeous Water Redstarts' (*Phoenicurus fuliginosus*) favourite rock, to name few. It was interesting to watch the Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*) and Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassinus*) in their breeding zones, instead of down South in their wintering grounds.

On another occasion, a lone Brown Wood Owl (*Strix leptogrammica*) surprised me by flying out of nowhere after being chased out of a pine forest by jungle crows. On another morning, I could count 6 pairs of Paradise-flycatchers within a 1-km stretch, the maximum I had ever seen in a walk. Three such pairs within a minute doubled my delight. At times, we used to spot them perched on wires, right outside our kitchen window overlooking the valley - a view my wife remembers fondly.

European Goldfinch

Mornings had their charm and surprises too. On one occasion, two European Goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*) turned up, giving enough time for me to capture a decent picture before disappearing, never to be seen again. A Yellow-breasted Greenfinch (*Chloris spinoides*) sighting on another day lit up the morning hike. Another pleasant memory was added by the Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), which lived up to its name. For days on end, we kept hearing the *cuckoo-cuckoo* calls and on one occasion, before the sun was out fully, one of them offered a peek-a-boo whilst sunning out!

Common Cuckoo

Talk about patience in birding makes me recollect two species. The path I used to take for my morning hikes criss-crossed many streams and rivulets. Several times, I got a glimpse of the secretive Forktails that fly off in a jiffy. After a lot of trial and errors, I figured out the formula to see one - start early - stay quiet near the stream - hope and pray that a Forktail turns up! Another species that made me follow it for 20 minutes just to get a glimpse was a pair of aptly-named Black-chinned Babblers (*Cyanoderma pyrrhops*) - a little bird and a memorable lifer.

Dharamshala town offers great birding and there is no better place than the bus-stand to start with. As one gets off a bus, a quick peek into the valley next to the bus stand can reward you with a sighting of an Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) or a Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*)! Right above Dharamshala, McLeodganj, the holy town of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, can get crowded during summer; however, upper Dharamkot, and the hike to Gallu Devi Temple and further to Triund Peak, is wonderful for birding. Upper Dharamkot bestowed me with a lifer in the Bar-tailed Treecreeper (*Certhia himalayana*) - what an amazing camouflage it had! On a day trip with family, we spotted the Rufous Sibia (*Heterophasia capistrata*) and the Black-headed Jay (*Garrulus lanceolatus*) from the hotel at Gallu Devi Temple, and the lady who runs the hotel showed us photos of the wonderful birds she gets to see from her balcony during winter, as the birds move down to lower altitudes. Her husband promised to show us a Himalayan Monal in winter, and I returned vowing to return!

Rufous Sibia

One of the fascinating experiences for me was to witness how the birds vary with altitude. For instance, the Cinereous Tit (*Parus cinereus*), found till 1200m, is replaced by the Green-backed Tit (*Parus monticolus*) as one gains altitude. While I could spot the Verditer Flycatcher at 2800m as well, the Parakeets were not seen beyond 1800m. Lower altitudes gave me the Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*) and Rose-ringed Parakeet - that completed 4 varieties of parakeets in the region.

Monsoons in Himachal kick off in late June or early July, and they bring along an interesting transformation in the landscape. The play of clouds and snow caps, the terraced paddy fields, the on-and-off rains - one can sit back and enjoy the magic of clouds, mountains and rain. The transformation is dramatic for birds too - all of a sudden, the Vultures are not to be seen, and the Parakeets seem to have moved to the plains or lower altitudes.

You would also notice nesting activity all around you. Hair-crested Drongos (*Dicrurus hottentottus*), Great Barbets, Oriental Magpie-robin (*Copsychus saularis*), Himalayan Black Bulbul (*Hypsipetes leucocephalus*) and Indian Robin (*Copsychus fulicatus*), to name a few, were spotted nesting and carrying food for young ones. Butterflies abounded and fireflies lit the nights. Watching the mass movement of emigrants in their thousands added to our great memories.

On another occasion, curiosity got the better of me and I stretched my regular hike further to gain another 300m altitude. A Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanos*) decided to surprise me, while a noisy Striated Prinia (*Prinia crinigera*) gave company, and a group of Streaked Laughingthrushes (*Trochalopteron lineatum*) popped up. On one bike birding trip, we spotted a dozen Black-throated Tits (*Aegithalos concinnus*) flying off from a tree, and a pair of Black-winged Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) overlooking a terraced farmland.

The villagers of Rakkar, where we stayed, belong to the Gaddi community, and are traditionally shepherds and excellent hikers. I joined them on one of the meadow hikes, where they leave the cattle for three months. Heavy rain washed off any sightings except a glimpse of a Thrush and a Pipit, but the memories of that hike with beautiful flowers and amazing plants inspires me to go back and try to sight those beauties again.

This little paradise has so much to offer that I returned with many unexplored locations on my list - Pong Dam is one such - besides some high altitude hikes, Bir and Billing (famous for paragliding) and Palampur, to name a few. Early or late winter apparently offers the best birding opportunities and decent weather, if one wishes to visit.

I must thank my family for being supportive of this mad adventure, and for joining the fun. Whoever said the call of mountains is strong, I could not agree more, especially when you have wonderful birds and the wonders of Mother Nature for company.

Stay options:

1. Dharamshala has many hotels, but during the tourist season it can get crowded. I recommend a village named Dharamkot in Upper Dharamshala, that has homestays that charge you as low as Rs200 per person per day, for stay (exclusive of food).

2. Gallu Devi Temple premises has 3 decent hotels with great views, which serve as a starting/ending point of the trek to Triund Peak of Dhauladhars.

3. Those who prefer a village-home stay experience can also check sites like Ghoomakad (http://ghoomakad.in/) - we rented a house through them for two-and-a-half months, and had a great time.

Reference: The Birds of Kangra, a comprehensive guide to bards of this region meticulously documented by Jan Willem den Besten
http://www.sanctuaryasia.com/component/content/article/569-book-reviews/1224-birds-of-kangra.html

A list of birds that I could identify:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Red Junglefowl	*Gallus gallus*	23	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
2	Kalij Pheasant	*Lophura leucomelanos*	24	Great Barbet	*Psilopogon virens*
3	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	25	Blue-throated Barbet	*Psilopogon asiaticus*
4	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	26	Speckled Piculet	*Picumnus innominatus*
5	Himalayan Griffon	*Gyps himalayensis*	27	Brown-fronted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos auriceps*
6	Eurasian Griffon	*Gyps fulvus*	28	Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos macei*
7	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	29	Grey-headed Woodpecker	*Picus canus*
8	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	30	Alexandrine Parakeet	*Psittacula eupatria*
9	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	31	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
10	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	32	Slaty-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula himalayana*
11	Oriental Turtle Dove	*Streptopelia orientalis*	33	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
12	Red Collared Dove	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*	34	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*
13	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	35	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
14	Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon	*Treron sphenurus*	36	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
15	Common Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*	37	Ashy Drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*
16	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	*Cacomantis passerinus*	38	Hair-crested Drongo	*Dicrurus hottentottus*
17	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	39	White-throated Fantail	*Rhipidura albicollis*
18	Asian Barred Owlet	*Glaucidium cuculoides*	40	Asian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*
19	Brown Wood Owl	*Strix leptogrammica*	41	Black-headed Jay	*Garrulus lanceolatus*
20	Common Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	42	Yellow-billed Blue Magpie	*Urocissa flavirostris*
21	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	43	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
22	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	44	Indian/Eastern Jungle Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
45	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*	66	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
46	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	*Culicicapa ceylonensis*	67	Oriental Magpie-robin	*Copsychus saularis*
47	Green-backed Tit	*Parus monticolus*	68	Verditer Flycatcher	*Eumyias thalassinus*
48	Cinereous Tit	*Parus cinereus*	69	Blue Whistling Thrush	*Myophonus caeruleus*
49	Black-lored Tit	*Machlolophus xanthogenys*	70	Spotted Forktail	*Enicurus maculatus*
50	Black-throated Tit	*Aegithalos concinnus*	71	Plumbeous Water Redstart	*Phoenicurus fuliginosus*
51	White-tailed Nuthatch	*Sitta himalayensis*	72	Blue Rock Thrush	*Monticola solitarius*
52	Bar-tailed Treecreeper	*Certhia himalayana*	73	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
53	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	74	Grey Bushchat	*Saxicola ferreus*
54	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*	75	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
55	Himalayan Bulbul	*Pycnonotus leucogenys*	76	Chestnut-tailed Starling	*Sturnia malabarica*
56	Himalayan Black Bulbul	*Hypsipetes leucocephalus*	77	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
57	Greenish Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochiloides*	78	Jungle Myna	*Acridotheres fuscus*
58	Grey-hooded Warbler	*Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*	79	Fire-breasted Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum ignipectus*
59	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	80	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
60	Striated Prinia	*Prinia crinigera*	81	Crimson Sunbird	*Aethopyga siparaja*
61	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	82	Yellow-breasted Greenfinch	*Chloris spinoides*
62	Oriental White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*	83	European Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*
63	Black-chinned Babbler	*Cyanoderma pyrrhops*	84	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
64	Streaked Laughingthrush	*Trochalopteron lineatum*	85	Russet Sparrow	*Passer rutilans*
65	Rufous Sibia	*Heterophasia capistrata*	86	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*

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Malabar Trails

Text and photos: Srikanth Bhamidipati

White-cheeked Barbet

When your best friend calls you to visit him for a weekend and insists that we should go on a road trip, one should never say no! When this happened to me, I contemplated until the weekend arrived and, taking a last-minute decision to leave town, headed for Bengaluru.

After reaching my first pit-stop, which is Bengaluru, I met up with my friend, and we started driving to our destination Wayanad at 2.00AM along with his wife and a couple of friends. Our next stop was the Mysore palace at 4.00AM; standing in front of the palace, which was all lit up, was nostalgic. After about 10 minutes, we resumed our journey towards Bandipur National Park and reached the gates by 6.00AM. This is where I was entering my fort, and coming back to this place almost after a year was an overwhelming experience. This is where, from the fast-forward mode of driving from Bangalore, I shifted to a slow-motion mode.

The first bird which greeted us at the entrance was a pair of Small Minivets, calling and playing together. But for me and one other friend, the rest were all handicapped when it comes to identifying birds - so it was a tough sell for me to get them interested in the birding, and I wanted to make it as interesting as possible. Climbing the hill, we saw a bird which my non-birder friends referred to as a woodpecker; I explained that it wasn't a woodpecker but rather an exceptional bird called the Common Hoopoe, which can which can survive in all kinds of terrain. A few feet away, we saw a few Spotted Deer and Sambhar.

Streak-throated Woodpecker

From the Forest Department office, we started our safari into the forest, and everyone enjoyed the beauty and amazing fragrance of the forest. The number of Streak-throated Woodpeckers was good - we saw at least 16-20 at different locations, and most of the time in pairs. There were Flycatchers, Bulbuls, Bee-eaters, Robins and many other birds, including a vulture-like bird far away, which I was sure was a Red-headed Vulture. Besides the birds, my friends were interested in the mammals, and were on the lookout for a tiger. No luck though – we just got a fresh pug-mark. The glimpse of a leopard sitting in the bushes with a kill was a good sight. Elephants having a sand bath, and a sighting of the Stripe-necked Mongoose, were indeed good sightings, besides the usual Indian Gaur.

Red-headed Vulture

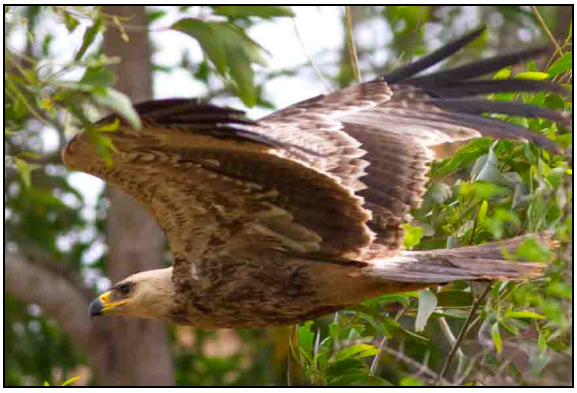
After every safari, we can hear interesting things - a few people share their experiences, and a few are agitated at not being able to see anything special. One such comment I heard was - "Didn't see a tiger, I just saw a pugmark… looks like someone has planted the pug-mark there." I wonder how people can expect to see all the animals in just one safari, without understanding the demographics of the animal and their behaviour. This motivates me to explain to them about animal behaviour - it's never too late to learn!

Dusky Crag Martin

After the safari, we decided to drive down till Mudumalai and thence return towards Wayanad. *En route*, we were lucky to spot some raptors, which we didn't see in the forest. First was a Crested Serpent Eagle, sitting in the open - probably enjoying a nice sun-bath. Next to show up was the Oriental Honey-buzzard, then the common raptors like Black-winged Kite and Brahminy Kite. Apart from the raptors, the bird life was pretty dull as there were only the other common species.

Black-eared Kite

On our way back we stopped for some breakfast and then decided to head to our resort in Wayanad - fatigue was catching up, and we wanted to rest for a while. A few kilometers out, I saw a bird with a red head sitting on a small hillock nearby. Flushing fatigue down the drain, we headed closer, and I started moving closer to the hillock on foot. I saw a few birds flying about, and started clicking all the birds in sight. I found Tawny Eagle (5), Red-headed Vulture (3), Black Kite (many), Black-eared Kite (4), Brahminy Kite (2) - and another bird which I identified as the Rufous-bellied Eagle. I was jumping with joy as I'd got a lifer, and made a few calls and informed all my friends about the sighting.



Tawny Eagle

Heading back towards Wayanad, another 3 hours of driving took us to Kalpetta, our destination. The location was just perfect, overlooking the Banasurasagar Dam.

White-bellied Woodpecker

I decided to call it a day for birding and spent some time with my friends. While checking the images later that night, I realized, much to my disappointment, that the bird I thought was the Rufous-bellied Eagle, was actually a Tawny Eagle – I was really sad at not being able to spot it.

Malabar Whistling Thrush

Next morning was a fresh start - I was woken up by the calls of Malabar Whistling Thrush and many other birds. Among all the calls, I heard one distinct call - that of the Wayanad Laughingthrush– unfortunately, due to the rain, I wasn't able to spot it.

Birding was difficult due to the rain, but I was still able to spot several good species like Black Eagle, Indian Paradise-flycatcher, White-cheeked Barbet, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Crimson-backed Sunbird, Jungle Myna, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Green Imperial Pigeon, some Cuckoos, Spotted Owlet, Malabar Trogon, and various common species.

Jungle Myna

After a sumptuous breakfast, my friends wanted me to take a few images for them. Having done that, we decided to head back to Bengaluru. As we were reaching our rooms, I spotted a Brahminy Kite flying past. After clicking a few images, I turned my head to see a bird flying just in front of my room. It looked like a large Shaheen Falcon - and to my joy I realised that it was none other than the Rufous-bellied Eagle! Finally able to spot the bird I so badly wanted to see, and click some good shots, my trip ended on a good note - which is when I realised that "Miracles do happen!"

Rufous-bellied Eagle

A list of birds seen on the trip:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Sl. No.	Common Name
1	Little Grebe	51	Crested Treeswift
2	Little Cormorant	52	Malabar Trogon
3	Darter	53	Common Kingfisher
4	Eastern Cattle Egret	54	White-breasted Kingfisher
5	Indian Pond Heron	55	Pied Kingfisher
6	Painted Stork	56	Green Bee-eater
7	Asian Openbill	57	Indian Roller
8	Black-headed Ibis	58	Common Hoopoe
9	Indian Black Ibis	59	White-cheeked Barbet
10	Eurasian Spoonbill	60	Coppersmith Barbet
11	Indian Spot-billed Duck	61	White-bellied Woodpecker
12	Oriental Honey-buzzard	62	Streak-throated Woodpecker
13	Black-winged Kite	63	Black-rumped Flameback
14	Black Kite	64	Singing Bushlark
15	Black-eared Kite	65	Dusky Crag Martin
16	Brahminy Kite	66	Barn Swallow
17	Red-headed Vulture	67	White-browed Wagtail
18	Short-toed Snake Eagle	68	Rosy Minivet
19	Crested Serpent Eagle	69	Small Minivet
20	Indian Shikra	70	Scarlet Minivet
21	Black Eagle	71	White-spotted Fantail
22	Tawny Eagle	72	White-throated Fantail
23	Rufous-bellied Eagle	73	Red-whiskered Bulbul
24	Crested Hawk Eagle	74	White-browed Bulbul
25	Grey Francolin	75	Yellow-browed Bulbul
26	Grey Junglefowl	76	Common Iora
27	Indian Peafowl	77	Jerdon's Leafbird
28	Purple Swamphen	78	Bay-backed Shrike
29	Common Moorhen	79	Orange-headed Thrush
30	Bronze-winged Jacana	80	Common Blackbird
31	Red-wattled Lapwing	81	Black-throated Thrush
32	River Tern	82	Malabar Whistling Thrush
33	Rock Pigeon	83	Wayanad Laughingthrush (Call)
34	Laughing Dove	84	Asian Paradise-flycatcher
35	Spotted Dove	85	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
36	Eurasian Collared Dove	86	Oriental Magpie Robin
37	Emerald Dove	87	White-rumped Shama
38	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	88	Indian Black Robin
39	Green Imperial Pigeon	89	Pied Bushchat
40	Vernal Hanging Parrot	90	Tawny-bellied Babbler
41	Rose-ringed Parakeet	91	Large Grey Babbler
42	Plum-headed Parakeet	92	Yellow-billed Babbler
43	Southern Coucal	93	Ashy Prinia
44	Jacobin Cuckoo	94	Common Tailorbird
45	Asian Koel	95	Blyth's Reed Warbler
46	Banded Bay Cuckoo	96	Great Tit
47	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	97	Pale-billed Flowerpecker
48	Brown Fish Owl	98	Purple-rumped Sunbird
49	Spotted Owlet	99	Purple Sunbird
50	Asian Palm-swift	100	Crimson Sunbird

Sl. No.	Common Name	Sl. No.	Common Name
101	Oriental White-eye	111	Jungle Myna
102	Indian Silverbill	112	Indian Golden Oriole
103	Scaly-breasted Munia	113	Black-hooded Oriole
104	Tricoloured Munia	114	Asian Fairy Bluebird
105	House Sparrow	115	Black Drongo
106	Streaked Weaver	116	White-bellied Drongo
107	Baya Weaver	117	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo
108	Brahminy Starling	118	Rufous Treepie
109	Asian Pied Starling	119	House Crow
110	Common Myna	120	Indian Jungle Crow

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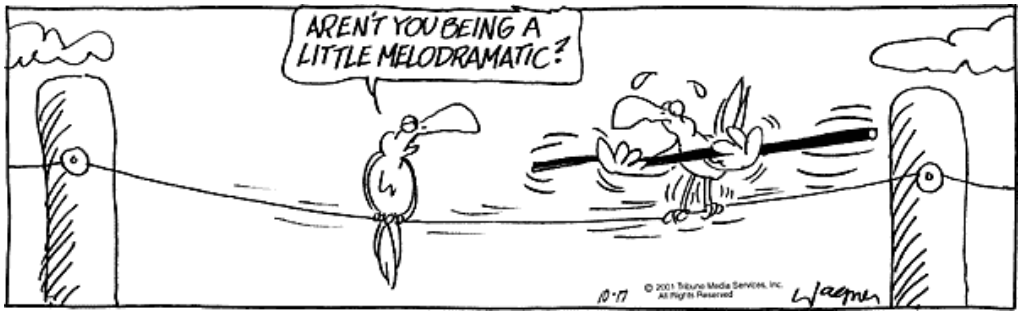
Bird Humour

(contributed by JVD Moorty)



(Animal Crackers by Fred Wagner)

Bird of the Month

Text: Umesh Mani; Photo: K Sudhir Moorti

Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*)

Indian Courser (Rollapadu, 21-08-2016)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Glareolidae
Genus: *Cursorius*
Species: *C.coromandelicus*
Size: 23cm

Description& distribution: The Indian Courser is found from the Indus Valley eastwards across India to just short of Bangladesh, and southwards to the tip of peninsular India, and occasionally in the dry areas of northern Sri Lanka. It is resident in some parts of its range, but makes local movements, and prefers dry scrubby, stony or rocky country.

It is brighter-coloured than its 'cousin', the Cream-coloured Courser, and has a broader black eye-stripe beginning at the base of the beak, which in turn is topped by a white stripe whose long feathers form a separate black patch where they meet on the nape. The chestnut crown and rufous breast are clearly marked. In flight, it shows a white rump and a not-very-contrasting black wing-tip. The whitish legs have only three forward-pointing toes.

Closely related to other coursers in the region, it is considered to form a superspecies with the Cream-coloured Courser (*C. cursor*, seen in Pakistan and north-western India), the Burchell's Courser (*C. rufus*, seen in the western parts of southern Africa) and Temminck's Courser (*C. temminckii*, seen in sub-Saharan Africa).

Habitat & behaviour: The Indian Courser is usually seen in small groups, near grass that is shorter than them. They run in short spurts, but sometimes take flight with a hoarse *gwaat* call. Its flight is quite strong, with rapid wing-beats; it flies low and runs on the ground after landing. Its diet consists mainly of insects like beetles, grasshoppers, termites and crickets, picked from the ground.

Nesting: The Indian Courser breeds mainly from March to August, and the nest is a scrape in the bare stony ground, though well-camouflaged. The usual clutch consists of 2 to 3speckled spherical eggs. The cryptic-coloured chicks crouch and remain immobile for long periods when startled, and are extremely difficult to spot. Adults stay away from and avoid displaying when the nest is approached.

Local name: The Indian Courser is known as *'nukri'* in Hindi and Punjabi, *'yerra chitawa'* in Telugu, and *'aal kaatti'* in Tamil.

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